



New View of Postmodernism on Local Normal Universities' Postgraduate Education Reform in China

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Abstract

Postmodernism has risen from 60's of last century and had a wide range of influence on the world. However, to date, no consensus has been reached on its definition. While anchoring to "adaptation" and "development", postmodernism could be redefined. By analyzing problems existing in teaching objective, curriculum, teaching methods, result assessment of current local normal universities' postgraduate education in China, and taking advantage of the new view of postmodernism, four strategies for reform are provided.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Normal University, Postgraduate education, Reform, China

1. Analysis of postmodernism

To begin with, we will provide a brief background on postmodernism. Over the course of the past 50 years, postmodernism has emerged from one construction style, and then activated in almost every social field. This concept has been attracting great attention and was studied intensively. However, at the time of this writing, there is still no consensus on its definition. Most scholars in China tend to regard it as the antithesis of modernism. It denies center and identity, but advocates things that are anti-tradition, anti-rationalism, and anti-holistic (Wang, 1992, P151). Of course, the concept also considered to be true when specifically to the field of education.

However, we have different views on this point. We believe that neither it choose to abandon modernism completely, nor accept it partly is important. What is essential is the concept that it should be meaningful to individuals even to the whole society. Postmodernism is not only a concept but also a state of social existence. While enjoying great convenience brought by industrialization, serious problems such as environmental pollution, economic crisis, and so forth also disturbing us. Therefore, as a newly developed cultural trend, postmodernism should be anchored to "adaptation" and "development", rather than dogmatically reject something existed. Whatever benefit individuals and society, comply with the spirit of times should be accepted and developed by postmodernism, and then be included by it. In short, postmodernism is a kind of flexible and open existence, which highlighting "adaptation" and "development".

2. Problems in current local normal universities' postgraduate education in China

Though great achievement has been made, it is not without problems. This part will be followed by four major problems exist in current local normal universities' postgraduate education in China:

2.1 The solely teaching objective does not fit well with diversity demands

Traditional teaching objective of normal universities' postgraduate education in China is to train and deliver teaching and research professionals to universities and other academic institutions. This is obviously an academic-oriented object. Under the guidance of this goal, normal universities cultivated talents who just emerged a feature of uniform. This phenomenon is even more serious in local normal universities in China by now. However, diverse needs for high level talents not only needs for academic type, but also for some kind of application types, or compound types are brought forward by the developing job market. Therefore, a conclusion could be made that postgraduate students cultivated by our current local normal universities couldn't meet the needs of our society.

Moreover, what still requires consideration is that distinct individuals show different needs for advanced education. The author chose 123 postgraduate students from local normal universities of China by random sampling, who were mainly from six provinces of China, including Shandong, Shanxi, Anhui, Hebei, Hubei and Guangxi to conduct a sample survey. The data used in the following example was taken from it in which online surveys, interview method were used and the samples were asked to use forced choice testing method. This example clearly demonstrates that the number of students who choose to apply for postgraduate education because of their enthusiasm for doing research is 9 (7%); while the number of trainees who act in accordance with their parents' expectation is 3 (2%); there are 6 people (5%) who simply followed the herd, because other people took part in the Postgraduate Entrance Examination, they did so; the number of students who were interested in their majors is 9 (7%); and the ones who chose to further their study because of a temporary escape the pressure on employment are 27 people (22%); there are 39 people (32%) who with the expectation of finding better jobs to go on studying; the number of students who chose to further their study because they wanted to get themselves improved or explored the meaning of life is 9 (7%); and there are still 21 people (18%) chose for other reasons. This sampling result is somewhat represent the diverse needs of people who have intension of furthering their study. It is obvious that the academic-orientated goal is not enough for students in local normal universities of China.

2.2 The rigidity curriculum could not meet flexible needs

As referred to postgraduate curriculum of current local normal universities in China, three major problems have yet to be addressed:

2.2.1 The attention paid to relationships between curriculums is not enough

As is known to all, the development of modern science has led to a growing body of disciplinary branches, as well as the continuous differentiation of knowledge. The deepening of this trend has been studied previously (Gilliam & Kritsonis, 2007, p.7). high levels of fragmentation which allows persons to wander off into isolated academic communities that need not communicate with or try to understand others or attempt to assimilate new knowledge beyond their specialties. Fragmentation also affects the ways in which knowledge is delivered. Education is increasingly disseminated in bits and pieces with little regards for unity and purposes of colleges and universities. In all things at the postgraduate stage of local normal education in China, professional training and direction of the division is more detailed than universities did. Course arrangement is just limited to the professional direction which was chosen at the beginning of the entrancement. However, the world we live in is an extremely complex one. If we only focus on some particular branch of subject, that might result in a decline in the power of explanation to the world, and fall into a one-sided understanding to facts. In a word, Debbie & William (2008, p.2) expanded that in today's educational society, learning is fragmented into segmented constraints of subject matter with little or no connection to the real world.

2.2.2 The elasticity of course arrangement is small

In the respect of course arrangement, required courses especially required common courses in current local normal universities' postgraduate education in China are somewhat on the high side, make arrangements for learners and the opportunities to choose freely too few and less elastic. Take a first-year graduate student's course-arrangement of one local normal university for example, in accordance with lesson plans, students must attend required courses 28 hours per week, therein they must attend required common courses (including political, English language courses) for 15 hours. In other words, the first year postgraduate students in this university have to spend 5.6 hours a day on average during workday attending required courses, in which the common required courses would take 3 hours. This may result in insufficient time for learners to do professional research, moreover, it does not have enough scope for developing their individual personalities. Not all learners are the same, so there is no set curriculum programs for them. Though elective courses have been carried out in local normal universities now, the freedom of learners is still relatively low.

2.2.3 The role of course orientation is not clear

For a long time, there is a tendency in China's local normal universities' postgraduate education that their curriculum arrangement was just drew close blindly to the comprehensive educational institutions, but ignored the individuality of their own. Thus it seems that there is no difference between such two kinds of educational institutions. And what is peculiar to local normal universities was not highlighted, which led China's current local normal universities' postgraduate training into an embarrassing situation.

2.3 The closed training mode does not fit well with the diversity needs

With the rapid development of broadcasting satellite and the Internet, information explosion era is coming. Gilliam & Kritsonis (2007, p.7) hold that knowledge is lodged everywhere means higher education is rapidly losing its knowledge monopoly. Opening has become an irreversible trend. However, in openness mechanism, China's current local normal universities' postgraduate education is not in-depth, regardless of the in-house aspect, intercollegiate as well as international exchanges, and the degree to society. Such kind of relative isolate condition, closed schools and training model, on the one hand, will inevitably lead to repeated setup of resources within the education system and some unnecessary waste, on the other hand, out of the education system, because most people could only contact with a variety of information provided by non-formal mass media, but information could not be equated with knowledge. This condition creates the phenomenon that Internet users in China have some problems in gaining knowledge, such as the depth of knowledge usage is obviously insufficient and so forth.

With China's rapid economic development, the urbanization process is accelerating, people's demand for postgraduate education is becoming stronger and stronger. Take postgraduate students' enrollment in 2009 for example, according to Corps Channel of Xinhuanet news reports (Lee, 2009) though the planned enrollment of postgraduate has increase by 5% in 2009, with 409,500 people, compared with last year, admission rate for those taking the National Entrance Examination for MA/MS Candidates is still only 32.86%. In other words, if take the admission rate of candidates as the evaluation index, then there would be 2/3 of the learners' demand for attending postgraduate schools are not met. Therefore, the opennig trained mode reform for postgraduate institutions is imperative to lanuch.

2.4 The mechanical consequence management could not meet the open demands

Nowadays, most local normal universities' postgraduate education in China still use traditional paper-pencil test form for evaluations. However, this test method has much to be desired. On the one hand, Skinner (2008, p.5) hold that tests are unable to evaluate an individual's ability to work with people or determine an individual's work ethic. On the other hand, even if only refers to dimensions on Sternberg's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, this single and mechanical measurement method fell to pieces. A standardized measurement approach would make education into a machine to create identity, the result is just simply clone of knowledge. Graduate schools' too much concern on scores and awards will inevitably lead to some imperative to strengthen the prevailed *proposal*, this management method restrained learners from bringing their wisdom and creativity into full play.

Most traditional normal universities' master degree stage on postgraduate education in China requires three years, while doctor degree stage requires two or three years. In recent years, in order to meet demands for talent in society, a number of colleges and universities carried out educational system reform, one of its measures is to compress the master stage of cultivation time into two years. However, the effect is not satisfactory. So the educational system reform emerged a *back flow* trend, part of them changed back to three-year educational system again. In fact, whether two years or three years, there is a lack of flexibility. Neglecting their own individual differences in students, just proceed the postgraduate educational system reform at its external form, the necessary consequence cannot possibly achieve satisfactory results.

3. Inspiration from postmodernism

3.1 diversity reform on teaching objective

In view of analysing demands of society and individuals, postmodernists insist that local normal universities' postgraduate education should adapt to society as well as to learners. Their teaching objectives should not rigidly adhere to the single academic goal, but should adopt an open, flexible, pluralistic approach, so that both the academic and application-oriented objectives are included. Specifically, this could be achieved by developing graduate schools' autonomy to set their own teaching objectives. Because as the most direct entity around scholars and the talent market, graduate schools could heard the voices from their needs at the first time. Therefore, enhancing graduate schools' autonomy in setting their own teaching objectives will help to make diversity and practical goals quickly and accurately. In addition, it is also important for deciding how best to use their resources, more competitive, and more responsive to public and private incentives for quality and efficiency. (Schwartzman, 2002, p.3). Leading local normal universities' postgraduate education to transit from administrative control to service orientation.

3.2 flexible reform on curriculum

Postmodernists insist that the curriculum should be open, personalized and unique. The following points could be considered to introduce to curriculum reform in current local normal universities' postgraduate education: first, to break barriers between disciplines, try to find and strengthen the link between subject in preparation and teaching processes, as well as explore new integration point. Second, the course setting and arrangements should be conducive to the cultivation of individuality of postgraduate learners, take full account of learner's aptitude and interest, by providing students with some relative guidance such as vocational aptitude tests and so forth, they can obtain a full understanding of their own. All of these above could help students from local normal universities in China make their own choices. Third, the amount of elective courses should be added, so that students have more freedom on choice space. Forth, we

can consider setting up a number of transitional preparatory courses to meet the growing demands for local normal universities higher education. Fifth, it should prominent the characteristics of local normal universities, by analysing needs of the community for teachers, add some corresponding courses, do have their characteristics in education, rather than follow the comprehensive educational institutions blindly.

3.3 opening reform on training mode

Postmodernists advocate that local normal universities' postgraduate stage of training model should be from close to open. To strengthen interschool and international cooperation and exchanges in order to achieve resource sharing as well as mutual learning. Concretely speaking, this concept could be fulfilled through broad interschool and international academic cooperation and exchanges, holding more opening lectures to society, more diversity form of joint training of postgraduates, sharing software and hardware resources and make full use of Internet resources, providing free and open learning platform, opening classrooms and libraries.

3.4 diversity reform on consequence management

Under the guidance of postmodernism, we hold that academic evaluation and educational system should be in a more flexible state. It is necessary to introduce Socrates evaluation into current local normal universities' postgraduate education's evaluation mechanisms, and it is better to combine formative assessment with summative evaluation. To take elective credits combined with the introduction of core courses and flexible courses. Therein, core courses for the acquisition of subject content, which are considered to be the knowledge to act as a framework for disciplinary system. They are basic platform for further study in-depth, thus are compulsory ones. While flexible courses covers a wide range of scalability which show students with different perspectives and ways of thinking to consider professional issues, and bring fresh blood for professional research. These courses are free electives for learners. Everyone may graduate after get enough credits.

Moreover, it is necessary to be more flexible for organization management, change the traditional fixed classroom into a kind of dynamic ones, class members are made of students who choose the same course. This may contribute to create a broader communicating and learning platform for students, as well as a diverse atmosphere. Of course, matched with a corresponding degree application system, such as the time of degree application, should also be of greater flexibility.

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